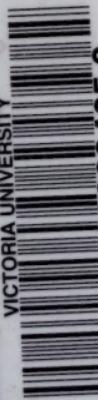


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# The Old Testament Problem

Albert C. Knudson

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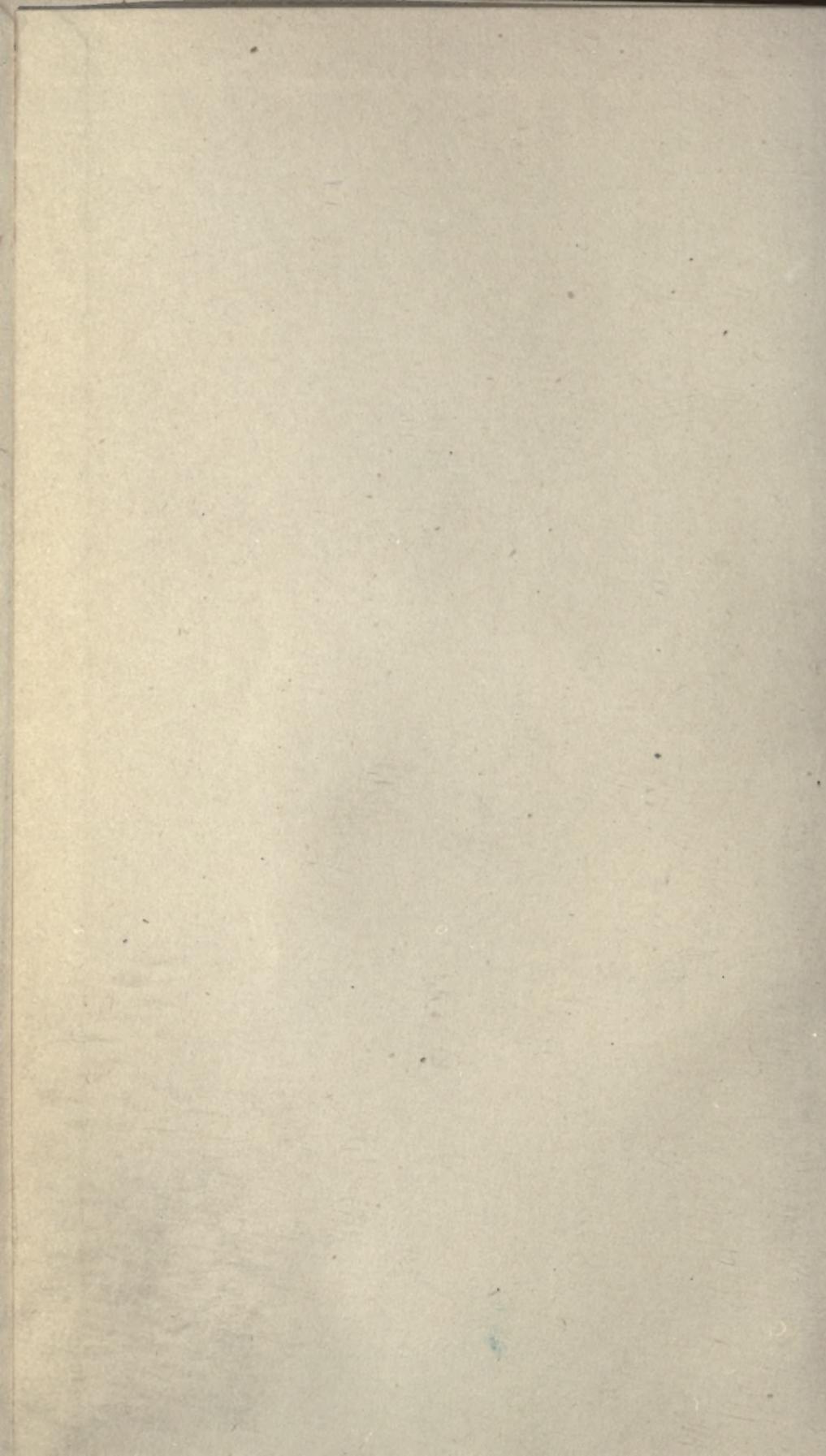
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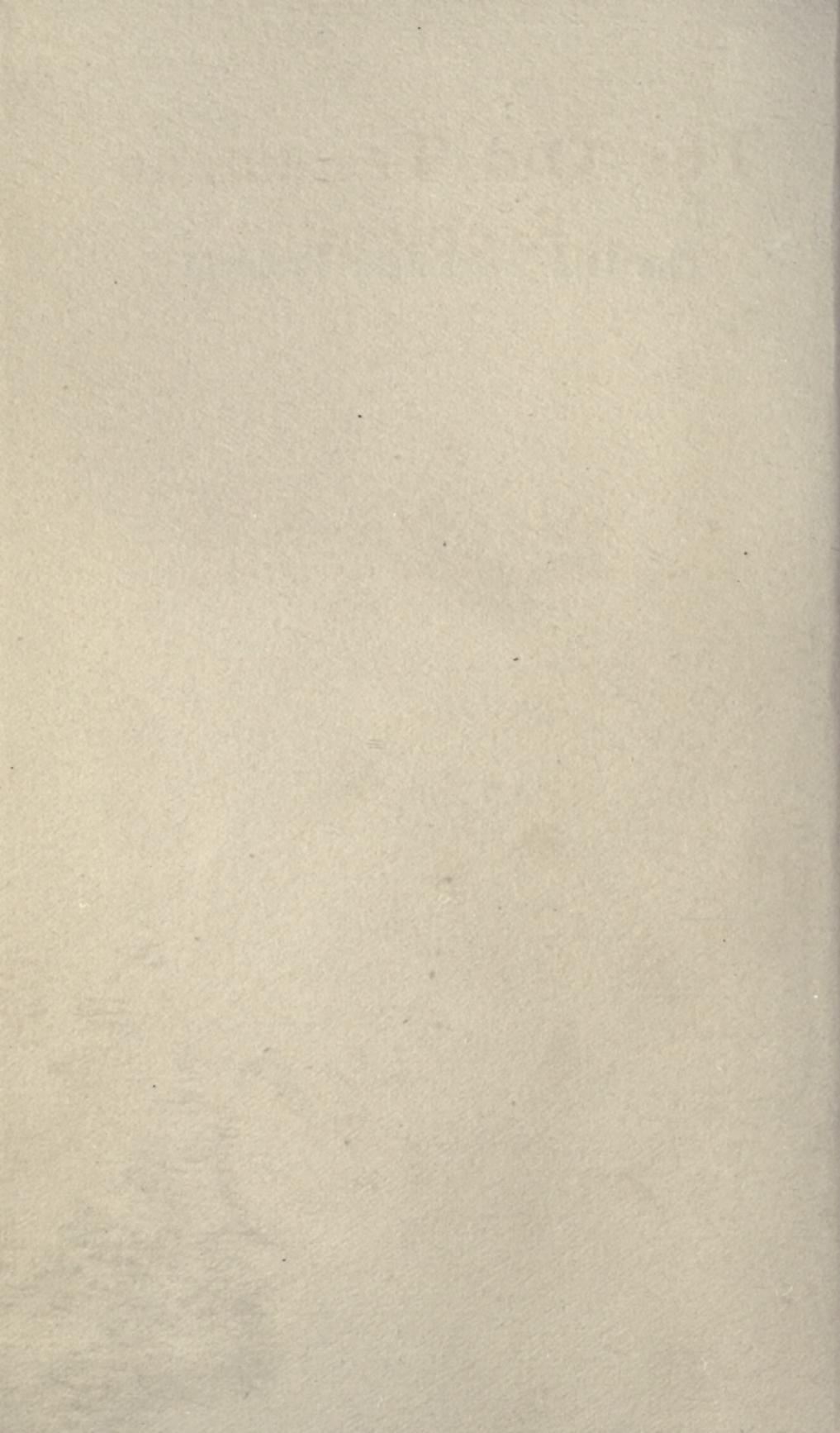
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# **The Old Testament Problem**



# The Old Testament Problem

*By*

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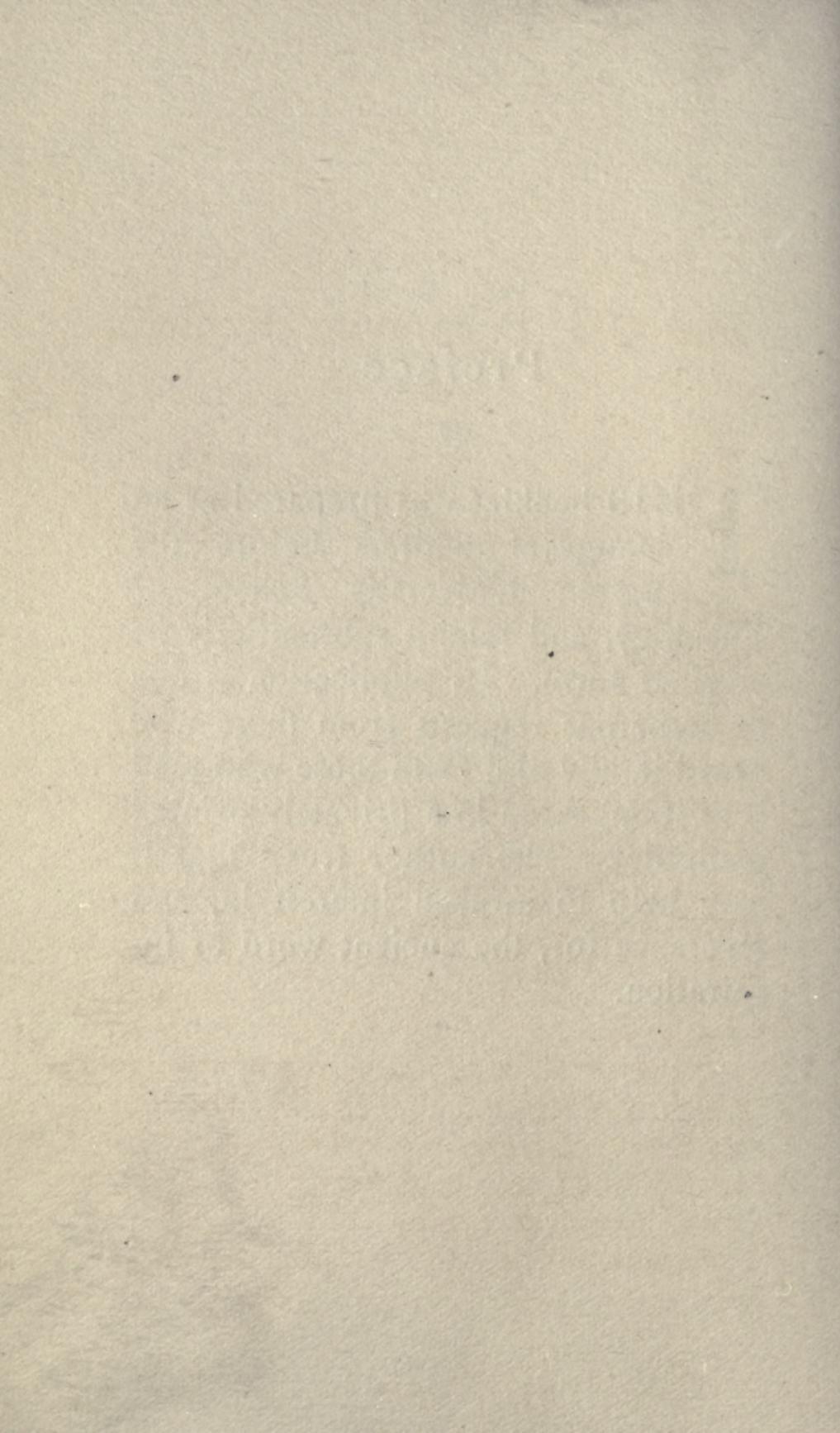
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## Preface



THIS booklet was prepared as an inaugural address before the Boston University School of Theology, and retains substantially its original form. Its publication is due to numerous requests from those who heard it, and also from those who read it as it appeared in a privately printed pamphlet. The author trusts that it may help to awaken interest in, and reverence for, the ancient word of inspiration.



## The Old Testament Problem



IT is not uncommon for people in this day to identify the problem of the Old Testament with the different questions raised by modern critics with reference to the date, authorship, and structure of its various books. But that is a serious mistake. These questions are interesting and have their proper place in theological education. But they form only the outskirts of the real problem. That problem has to do with what is, after all, the only essential thing connected with the Old Testament; namely, its religious evaluation. Can these old books be so read and studied and taught as inevitably to commend themselves to the Christian heart and conscience and intelligence as the very truth of God? And if so, how? Such, as I conceive it, is the only vital question in this field of study.

And this is no new problem. It is as

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old as the Christian Church. The first disciples had to face it, and so have all Bible readers ever since. Some aspects of the problem have varied from age to age, but the underlying problem itself has been the same.

It has owed its origin to two facts, which have been more or less keenly felt throughout the whole history of the Church. One is the unintelligibility or obscurity of considerable portions of the Old Testament; the other is its scientific and religious shortcomings, or what at least seem to be such. So far as the former is concerned, the Old Testament shares that with every ancient work. No book is wholly intelligible except to its own age and to the people of its own tongue. The farther removed it is from them, the more difficult becomes its interpretation. For one thing, words are continually changing their meaning, so that a literary work in any language a few centuries old needs a commentary attached to it. And then, when it comes to a different tongue, no translation can adequately reproduce the original. It may render the general meaning with a fair degree

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of accuracy, but the peculiar turns of expression, that give concreteness and life and character to the original, are frequently incapable of reproduction. Especially is this true where the two languages are essentially different in structure, and sustain no kinship to each other, as is the case with the Hebrew and the English. This difficulty may, to some degree, be overcome by a mastery of the original. But very few have the time for that and still fewer the inclination. And even with the most accomplished Hebraists the ancient tongue lacks the freshness and realism of the language of every-day speech. So that even they are left at a parallax with the original.

But this linguistic difficulty, which attaches to all ancient works, is less serious than that which grows out of the changed conditions of life and thought. Every book is in some measure the outcome of the intellectual atmosphere of its own time, and can be perfectly interpreted only in its light. The point to many expressions, their peculiar flavor and coloring are due to the state of feeling at the time when they were

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written. To a later age they are likely to be devoid of significance. Then, too, numerous allusions, that are perfectly clear at the time when they are made, become later wholly unintelligible. The great task, therefore, of the interpreter of any ancient work is to determine the conditions of life and thought under which it originated. This is in no case an easy task. But, if our critics are to be trusted, it is especially difficult in the case of the Old Testament. For its books are very few of them unities. In some instances several documents of varying ages have been united together, and in others extensive interpolations from a later date have been made, so that single chapters, yea, single verses, are divided up among different authors that lived centuries apart. The question, therefore, of the intelligibility of the Old Testament, particularly to the average reader, is a serious matter.

The chief stumbling-block, however, to a living interest and faith in the Hebrew Scriptures has been found in their scientific and religious shortcomings. The scientist has taken exception to the miraculous element in them, or at

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least, to certain features of it. Some of the miracles, for instance, seem to lack an adequate occasion and a proper moral motive. As examples we may cite the gift of speech attributed to Balaam's ass, the standing still of the sun at Joshua's command, the swimming of the ax-head, and the swallowing of Jonah by the whale. Again, he has had difficulty with the first chapters of Genesis. These have seemed to be at complete variance with the accepted conclusions of geology. And this fact, to some minds, has appeared fatal to the claims of Christianity as a whole. It is not long since that a distinguished English scientist was asked why he did not throw his immense influence on the side of religion, and in reply made this statement: "You show me your religious book; I open it, and discover that its first page contradicts all my knowledge. What, then, am I to do?"

But it is not only natural science that has grounds of complaint against the Old Testament. The new science of history has equal, if not more serious, difficulties with it. We are

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told by even moderate representatives of it, that the Old Testament historical books give "a thoroughly one-sided and, in many respects, incorrect picture of the profane history; and, on the other hand, an absolutely false representation of the religious history of the people."

From these facts it is evident that the scientific spirit of modern times has not found the Old Testament altogether congenial. There have been some pretty sharp passes between them, and peaceful relations have not yet been fully established. But, taking the history of the Church as a whole, it is not the unscientific features of the book, but its moral and religious shortcomings that have given chief offense. For, in spite of the logic of our theological consequence-makers, there has always been a conviction, more or less clear, among Christian people not debauched by speculation, that whatever scientific failings it might have, it was still safe, provided its religious teaching could be trusted. If, however, that were open to suspicion, then its very foundations were insecure. It has,

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therefore, been a serious concern to the apologist, that it has not fully squared with the spirit of Christianity. For one thing, it betrays a lower moral tone. The deception practiced by the patriarchs is recorded without condemnation. The crude and cruel law of retaliation is sanctioned as of divine origin. The treachery of Jael is highly lauded. And an intense and bitter national spirit is inculcated, one that brooks no sympathetic intercourse with foreign peoples and permits no eye of pity to fall even on their wives and children if they stand in the way of Israel's mission. This narrow spirit we find in widely separated portions of the Old Testament. It appears in the later prophetic utterances; it is embodied in the legislation; and it receives startlingly strong expression in the imprecatory Psalms.

Then, again, the distinctively religious ideas of the old covenant are some of them foreign to Christian thought. Take, for instance, the anthropomorphic representations of the Deity. In Genesis Jehovah is spoken of as walking in the garden in the cool

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of the day, and as smelling the sweet savor of the sacrifice. Observe, also, His national character. He seems for the most part interested only in one people and neglectful of, if not hostile to, others. Then note, too, the large amount of attention given to matters of ritual and temple service. In these we have no interest at present, and by no normal exercise of the imagination could have.

With reference to the Old Testament we are then left in this situation. Considerable portions of it are partially, if not wholly, unintelligible, at least to the ordinary reader, and other portions of even greater extent are obsolete. This has been the case throughout the whole of Christian history, and hence the question has necessarily arisen as to whether it can really be regarded as a sacred book, as a book with a divine message for Christian people. That it is such has commonly been accepted on the authority of Christ. But this has not solved the problem. For the causes of offense have still remained, and it has still been a question how the book, which He sanctioned

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and which should, therefore, commend itself to the Christian heart, could be made to carry within itself the immediate evidence of its inspiration, and thus come to be a living force in the Church.

Now the primary condition of any work that is to appeal to the human mind is intelligibility. A book can influence men only to the degree in which it is understood—or misunderstood. For misunderstandings may be quite as influential as understandings. And that suggests that the matter of interpretation is not so simple as it may at first seem to be. We accept the general principle that the correct interpretation of any passage is the one that the author himself had in mind. But are we to conclude from this that the literary value of a work is to be measured solely by the psychological contents of the author's mind at the time he composed it? Is it not rather one of the characteristics of literary genius that it is possessed of germinative power, that it is able to stimulate within others ideas that may never have distinctly occurred to the author? Ibsen once said: "Not alone those who write, but

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also those who read, compose, and very often they are more full of poetry than the poet himself." The question I raise, then, is this: Does the poetry of the reader have no place in correct interpretation? Is it not indeed one of the mysterious powers of the poet that he is able to make poets of his readers? And is it not this kinship of spirit that is the key to true appreciation, rather than the wooden effort to make one's own psychological contents square with those of the author? Then, too, in the case of the Bible the problem of interpretation has always had a double aspect, one historical and the other practical. There has always been a desire to interpret it in the light of its own times. At the same time there has been the pressing necessity of applying its teaching to the immediate needs of the Church. These two tendencies do not necessarily exclude each other; at the same time they do not necessarily include each other. In the course of the Church's history one has often been pursued independently of the other, and not infrequently there has been discord between them. Rightly to adjust

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the one to the other is one of the finest intellectual tasks to which the minister of to-day is called.

The problem of Biblical interpretation, then, is no simple one. It is not merely a scientific matter. It is necessarily, and to no small degree, complicated by the principle of utility. One might present what would be regarded as a sound historical exegesis of the Old Testament, or parts of it, and yet the interpretation as a whole might be altogether inadequate and, indeed, in large part, misleading. Truth is no mere reproduction of facts; it is a complex and delicate spiritual balance that ceaselessly adjusts itself to the changing currents of human thought and feeling. No man, then, can be a true interpreter of Scripture who does not behold the signs of his own time as well as those of the past, and adapt himself to them. It would hardly be an extravagance to say that some people have understood the Bible better who have misunderstood it, than others who have claimed to have a correct scientific understanding of it.

But—to return from this excursus—

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whatever theory of interpretation one may adopt, it is evident that some kind of interpretation is necessary to give to a book any influence whatsoever beyond that of a mere fetish. And that interpretation must be such as to appeal to the common intelligence. It must harmonize with the commonly accepted principles of literary and historical study. Otherwise it could at the best appeal only to an esoteric circle. The first task, therefore, of the Church in dealing with the Old Testament has been to interpret it, to render it intelligible, and intelligible to the average mind. The way for this was fortunately prepared by the fact that it was, to begin with, a popular book, a book for the people. In Assyria and Babylonia, and in heathen religions in general, the highest religious ideas were reserved for a select few. The mass of the people were supposed to be so deeply sunk in "folly" as to be incapable of appreciating them. In Israel, on the other hand, there was no such distinction between the "wise" and the "foolish." The only "foolish" there recognized were those that knew but

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rejected the higher teaching and walked in their own willful and heathenish ways. The Old Testament, then, was addressed to all, and was adapted to their needs. Much of it has consequently always been intelligible to the common man. But with the lapse of time, through various natural causes, considerable portions of it, as we have seen, came to be either unintelligible or difficult of interpretation, while the rest lost something of its freshness and force. It became, therefore, the primary task of scholars to reclaim this lost territory, to throw light upon the obscure passages and to illumine the book as a whole by their researches and discoveries.

An important work in this direction was done by the early Church. But the means at its command were limited. The scientific spirit was imperfectly developed. The immediate demands of its own time it may have met with a fair degree of success. But for later times and different conditions it left much to be desired. It is to modern scholarship that the lot has fallen of grappling with this problem of the

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intelligibility of the Old Testament in a seemingly final way. Its labors have been characterized by unrestrained freedom and by an astonishing thoroughness. Its resources both in the form of method and of material seem almost unlimited. It would take volumes, indeed it has taken whole libraries, to record all that has been done in the field of textual criticism, of philology, and of archæology, simply for the purpose of making this ancient literature more intelligible to us. That much of this has been of real worth goes without saying. The text has been improved at many points; the original tongue has come to be better understood; and the political and religious environment of Israel throughout her whole history has been brought out into the light in a way that was hardly dreamed of as possible a century ago.

Still, even more fruitful than any of these lines of investigation has been that carried on in the field of what is called the "higher criticism." Here the effort has been made on the basis chiefly of internal data, literary, historical, and theological, to determine

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the structure of the various Old Testament books, their date, their authorship, and other points of interest with reference to them, that would throw light upon the conditions under which they originated, and so enable us better to understand them. This line of inquiry has proven extraordinarily attractive to many minds. An amazing amount of industry has been expended upon it. In carrying it out tradition has been thrown to the winds, and ingenuity and fancy have been given free rein. The result has been conjectural emendations of the text beyond number, and the discovery of a whole brood of ancient Hebrew authors, the very thought of whose existence had not until these latter days entered into the heart of man. Instead of some of the familiar Biblical names, we now hear of J and E and P and D, and each of these again raised from the first to the third or fourth power. Then there are redactors and glossators to burn. Some are of the J stripe, some have the E brand, some combine the qualities of both and are called JEs, some belong to the D class, and others are of the P

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tribe. Indeed, a large part of the alphabet, supplemented by the algebraic device of exponents, is used up in the effort to designate these hitherto unknown Biblical authors and collaborators, and even then a whole host of them are left nameless, like ghosts who occasionally make a disturbing noise, but do not manifest themselves with sufficient frequency and definiteness to make them worthy of receiving specific designations.

Among these numerous authors and redactors, known and unknown, named and unnamed, the text is carefully distributed verse by verse. Different kinds of type and sometimes different colors of ink are, so far as practicable, used to distinguish them. Their literary styles are analyzed, their theologies expounded, and their inner motives laid bare. And all this is done for the purpose of making the Scriptures more intelligible to us. For it is to be borne in mind that this critical work has for the most part been carried on within the Church. A few enemies, no doubt, have gotten into the field and sown tares. But on the whole

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the movement has been conducted in the interest of the Christian faith. Its one great purpose has been to remove the obscurities and unintelligibilities of the sacred text. And that much has been achieved is evident to every one who has any acquaintance with this line of investigation. A new definiteness, concreteness, and realism have been imparted to large portions of Scripture.

This is especially true of the prophetic books. Instead of being mere collections of oracles of rather dubious import, without any vital connection with their own times or with the progress of revelation, they have been shown to contain the most vital and significant utterances in all the Old Testament. Nowhere in all the history of Israel are to be found more striking and commanding personalities than their authors. They tower like giants above their times. In the crucial periods of their people's history, when it seemed that the true religion was about to fall into ruin under the weight of moral corruption, popular superstition and heathenism, and for-

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eign invasion, these men snatched, as it were, from the very bosom of God the great truths of His righteousness, His love, His sovereignty, and armed with these went out and smote the offenders against the moral law of God, high and low, lashed the people for their superstition and heathenism with ridicule and scorn, rebuked the craven fear of king and multitude, and hurled defiance into the teeth of the insolent invader. It is one of the most thrilling spectacles of history to observe the originality and fertility of conception, the passion of soul, and the sublimity of faith with which these lonely men on the Palestinian hills met the impending doom of their people. One can not do so, one can not watch them in their apparently unequal struggle with ignorance and iniquity at home and with brute force abroad without receiving a new injection of moral heroism. It is as though the magnetic and dynamic power of these great souls somehow leaped across the chasm of these two and a half millenniums and penetrated our very being. Such is the vivid appreciation of these men im-

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parted to us by these critical studies. And so over the whole Old Testament a new breath of life has been made to blow.

But, while this is true from the scholar's standpoint, it is not all so simple and clear from the popular point of view. To the lay mind the critical study of the Bible has had its marked limitations. Its elaborate scientific terminology has been repellent. Its polychrome editions, instead of illuminating the sacred page, have seemed rather to make confusion worse confounded. Its hesitating and divergent conclusions have awakened distrust of the method as a whole. Then, too, while admitting that it has explained many difficult and obscure passages, it is still held that it has created new and even more serious difficulties. To a degree that was unsuspected before it has taught that the Old Testament is permeated with the scientific, moral, and religious shortcomings of its own time. That these were present to some extent has always been known, and has constituted a serious problem. The early Church met it by the al-

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legorical method of interpretation, which it had inherited from the Jews. This method made it possible for them always to find in passages, whose natural sense created difficulty, a deeper spiritual meaning in harmony with Christian thought. But this left room for endless caprice, and could not but be repugnant to minds with an instinctive sense of reality and a native love of truth. With the dawn of the modern era it was consequently gradually discarded, and in its place arose the habit of resorting to harmonistic devices of one kind and another. Any passage, whose apparent meaning seemed unworthy of an inspired book, was, by a forced exegesis, tortured into meaning something different. But this method also was manifestly lacking in veraciousness. It may have been made necessary by the theological presuppositions of earlier times, but it could not hope successfully to face the scientific temper and strict historical sense of more recent years. The result is that it has now been established as a fixed principle of hermeneutics that the Bible must be interpreted just as any

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other book is. Our inquiry, as we study it, must always be, not, What could this verse or passage mean? but, What did it mean? or, What does it mean? From this principle there is no escape. The thinking world will tolerate none other. But this new attitude, valuable as it may be in itself, has still increased our difficulties. For it has shown that the sacred writers were enmeshed in the transient customs and thought of their own time to an extent that had not been realized before.

In spite, then, of the fact that we understand the Old Testament in its original meaning far better than we ever did, the most serious part of our problem still remains unsolved. It is still a question how it may be made to appeal to the Christian heart and conscience and intelligence of to-day as the very truth of God. No doubt its greater historical intelligibility has contributed in no small measure toward this end. It has made possible a far more vivid appreciation of it as literature and a far more vital grasp of the progress of revelation in it. But many Old Testament scholars seem to

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be obsessed with the idea that their sole task is to present a scientific exegesis of the text and to trace accurately the evolution of Israel's religion. They have literally compassed land and sea in the effort to restore a single verse or even expression to its primitive meaning. And that this is commendable zeal I do not deny. But while they have, with such painstaking care, tithed the mint, anise, and cumin, they ought not to have neglected the weightier matters. And the weightier matters have always been the practical application and the religious use of Scripture. Apart from that, its correct historical interpretation is of slight value.

We come, then, at last, to this central part of our problem. How, in spite of its obsolete features, can the conviction be developed that the Old Testament is still the Word of God to us? And here we are met at the outset by an appeal to history that might seem to render our inquiry unnecessary. The whole history of the Church, it is claimed, makes it clear that, as a matter of fact, this ancient collection of

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books has always laid hold of the Christian heart in demonstration of the spirit and of power. From the preaching of Jesus down to the present it has continually been a source of religious inspiration and guidance. Into every circumstance of life it has come with a quickening influence. On the bed of suffering, at the fireside, in the study, in the market-place, in the councils of state, on the battlefield, and in all the multitudinous relations of life, men have felt its magic power. They have pondered over its words by day and by night. Thus, through the centuries, it has woven itself into the very texture of Christian thought and feeling, so that it has come to be true, as some one has said, that Christianity as well as the Bible has its Old Testament half. That, then, the Old Testament commends itself to the Christian as the Word of God is not open to question. History attests it as a fact. Furthermore, it is held that this conviction, with reference to its divine origin, has not been due to the work of scholars. No theological instruction has brought it about. Men in perfect simplicity

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of soul, without the training of the schools, and without any consciousness of method, have gone to its pages and there found such spiritual refreshment as could have come only from above. There is, then, no "how" to this whole matter. Let the Christian heart be brought face to face with the written word, and the divine character of the latter will attest itself.

Now that this line of reasoning possesses some force is not to be denied. The appeal to history is significant. We have not adequately taken into account what the Old Testament has meant to Christianity. We have not with sufficient thoroughness studied its history as a factor in the life of the Church. At this point there is, so it has recently been claimed by a distinguished German theologian, and I am inclined to agree with him, a gap in current theological instruction. An incalculable amount of labor has been devoted to unraveling the historical process by which the Hebrew canon came into being, but very little, comparatively, to its subsequent history in the Christian Church. Some of the

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energy devoted to the former subject might well be transferred to the latter. If it were generally known how completely these ancient Scriptures have wrought themselves into the very warp and woof of Christianity, there would be less disposition to underrate their value, and there would be fewer heretical utterances with reference to them. For heresy in every case has its root either in ignorance of history or in a lack of appreciation of its significance. The testimony, then, of Christian history to the Old Testament is a fact that needs to be reckoned with. And so it is also true that the sacred book has not reserved its treasures for the scholar. Freely through the ages it has opened them to every devout reader. Indeed the spirit of piety, it has generally been held, is more essential to a true understanding of its divine message than any degree of learning. It does not enable us to appreciate in it "the richly colored iris of antiquity," —the culture of the schools is necessary for that,—but it does open our eyes, as Professor Kaehler has said, to "the bright, clear sunlight of revelation that

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pours itself out over the monotonous history of Israel." And for this spirit there is no substitute. It is the presupposition of all religiously helpful study of the Scriptures.

But, while all this is true, it does not solve, nor does it vacate, our problem for us. For no matter how clear and convincing the *testimonium spiritus* may have been with reference to the Old Testament, it has not removed from it its shortcomings. And to many these have proven an insuperable difficulty. One large sect in the early Church, which took its rise shortly after the apostolic age, rejected the Hebrew Scriptures outright as unworthy of a place in the Christian canon. Some in recent times have also taken the same view. A prominent literary man not long since characterized them as "the millstone about the neck of Christianity." And the distinguished son of one of the most distinguished and highly-revered Old Testament scholars in Germany made, only a few years ago, this statement: "The more deeply I immerse myself in the spirit of the prophetic literature of the Old

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Testament the greater becomes my distrust of Jehovah, who butchers the peoples with the sword of His insatiable anger, who has but one favorite child, while he consigns all other nations to darkness, shame, and ruin." No doubt such cases as these are extreme. But they nevertheless reflect current sentiment in some circles. Then, too, in the *testimonium spiritus*, which has proven satisfactory to many devout souls, there is an implicit logic. The pious heart has an unconscious intellectual method of its own. And the function of the theologian is to analyze this immanent logic, to reduce it to definite principles, and to relate it to contemporary thought. Only in this way can the intellect be satisfied. However confident, therefore, we may be with reference to the self-attesting power of the Old Testament, it is still our duty to give a reason for the faith that is in us, and to show how, in spite of its antiquity, in spite of its shortcomings, it still commends itself to the Christian heart and conscience and intelligence as the Word of God.

The detailed solution of this prob-

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lem would call for a volume. I have time only for two general suggestions. And first, *the great outstanding characteristics of the Old Testament religion should be brought into the foreground and kept there.* This principle has both a paedagogical and an apologetic basis. No subject is adequately understood that is not understood in its entirety. The details are to be studied, but it is to be borne in mind that they become significant and luminous only in the light of the whole. It is important, therefore, that the student in any line of work should early be introduced to the essential principles and the broad outlines of his subject, and that he be taught to keep these in mind in all his subsequent study. For there is always a danger that men may fail to see the forest because of the trees. Especially is this true in this scientific age with its tremendous stress on facts and original research. There are a host of men in the different sciences who may be fitly described as great at small things, but small at great things. A limited field of facts they have completely mastered, but the subject as a whole and

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in its general relations they have apparently little interest in and no grasp of. The result is a lopsided development and a distorted vision. Simply as a paedagogical discipline, therefore, it is important that the student of the Bible have early in his course indelibly impressed upon his mind the great distinctive features of Old Testament teaching, so that he may be guided by them in all his subsequent study of detail.

But this method has also its apologetic value. For the inspiration of the Old Testament is to be seen most clearly, not in its individual utterances, but in its general conception of religion. It is this that has propagated itself; it is this that alone is significant. Particular sayings here and there may or may not be in harmony with the New Testament; they may or may not be paralleled in heathen writings. That is a matter of slight consequence, whichever way it may be settled. The only important question is as to whether in its essential teaching it stands, on the one hand, in an organic connection with Christianity, and, on

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the other, in a position of antithesis to heathenism, or, at least, of uniqueness as compared with it. On these two points every one should seek to be perfectly clear.

We have already referred to the fact that a large body of early Christians, the Gnostics, rejected the Old Testament as contradictory to the New. The Church as a whole considered this a heresy, and so excluded them from its fellowship. In this it was undoubtedly guided by a sound instinct. Jesus Himself had accepted the law and the prophets. His own statement was that He came not to destroy, but to fulfill them. A proper regard for His authority, therefore, necessarily carried with it a reverent attitude toward them. And, as a matter of fact, they at first constituted the only Christian Scriptures. But they were not accepted simply on His authority. Or rather, His authority in the matter was not arbitrary. It was based on rational insight into their essential nature and historical significance. A recent writer on the Old Testament has said that "no man save Jesus had a right to lay it

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aside, and He made it immortal." But it is hardly true to say that even He had the right to lay it aside. Indeed, He could not have done so without stultifying Himself. For He had adopted the essential principles of its teaching. If they were, then, inspired as He uttered them, they must also have been inspired as they fell from the lips of the prophets who preceded Him.

But the Old Testament was not simply the foundation of Jesus' work. It was not merely the historical prerequisite of His ministry. It was a constituent element in His message to the world and remains such to this day. The New Testament taken alone does not give an exhaustive nor even an adequate presentation of His teaching. His utterances had as their constant background the Hebrew Scriptures. He accepted them; so did His hearers. In so far, then, as they were not inconsistent with His teaching, they may properly be regarded as forming part and parcel of His total conception of religion. The very fact that He indorsed them in the way that He did

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would seem to imply that He expected His own words to be supplemented by their ampler and more varied expositions of certain phases of divine truth. For instance, there is in the New Testament a tendency to individualism and to what looks like a narrow evangelism. This needs to be offset by the social message of the prophets and by their broad outlook upon human life. It is not infrequently said, and truly, that the Old Testament should be interpreted in the light of the New. But it is equally true, though in a somewhat different sense, that the New should be interpreted in the light of the Old. It is the whole Bible that contains God's word to us, not simply the New Testament. Either part would be incomplete without the other. "The Old Testament," as George Adam Smith says, "lies not under, but behind, the New. It is not the quarry of the excavator or archæologist. . . . It is the Hinterland of the new; part of the same continent of truth, without whose ampler areas and wider watersheds the rivers, which grew to their fullness in the new dispensation, could never have

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gained one-tenth of their volume or their influence."

This fact of the organic and, to a certain extent, co-ordinate relation of the old dispensation to the new every student of the Bible should clearly apprehend. He should also have a clear understanding of the contrast between the religion of Israel and heathenism. The effort has been made in some quarters of late to obscure this contrast. The comparative study of religions, it is claimed, has shown that there is no essential difference between the religion of Israel and other ethnic faiths. But this is a very superficial verdict. No doubt in the externals of religion the resemblance has been shown to be far more marked than was once supposed. But the very investigations that brought this to light have also brought out into new clearness the essential uniqueness of the Old Testament. Two great discoveries, it has been shown, distinguish its teaching from all heathen faiths. The first is that religion is law, moral law; the other is that religion is love. The former of these saved religion from the supersti-

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tion of divination and ceremonialism, and made it at once a rational and a socially useful institution in the world. A few moments' reflection will make this clear. The distinguishing feature of religion in its heathen form is to be found, not so much in its idolatry, as in its stress on magic and rites. It sanctifies the inconsistent, absurd, and often harmful usages and beliefs of the past. It subjects the individual to the iron rule of irrational custom. Thus it stands in the way both of social and intellectual progress. But all this is changed when religion comes to be attached to and identified with the moral nature. It then comes to be both socially useful and rational. For morality constitutes the basis of every healthy and progressive society; and this very usefulness necessarily wins for it a rational standing. Men may try to prove that the light of conscience is only "the unmeaning phosphorescence of our nature," and that the laws of right are "provincialisms of this planet," but such a conclusion will never commend itself to thoughtful men. The moral nature stands in its

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own right as the most worthwhile element in human life. Serious-minded men of intelligence everywhere instinctively recognize this. They have no necessary difficulty, therefore, in accepting the doctrine of the prophets, that when this highest peak of our being kindles, it is God that has set it on fire. Indeed, such a faith appeals to them at once as a rational faith. No growth of intelligence can ever render it obsolete. The rationality of morality guarantees for all time the rationality of moralized religion.

But great and epoch-making as was this discovery, that religion is law, it needed as its complement the equally great discovery that religion is love. The former saved religion from superstition and uselessness; the latter deepened it into the most intimate and precious of personal relationships. The former raised religion to the plane of morality; the latter raised morality to the plane of religion. For religion may be both lower and higher than morals. It is higher in so far as it reaches out beyond the things of sense and finds in the Infinite the guarantee

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of every high and holy hope. But both ideas, that religion is law and that it is love, are essential to each other. The first without the second would sink into a fatalistic legalism; the second without the first would degenerate into an immoral sentimentalism. Taken together they constitute the most exalted conception of religion and of human life attainable by man. And this we find in the Old Testament. It did not there express itself in a perfect form. It did not develop all its logical implications. It pointed to the future for that. But the idea itself is there, and in power. It underlies the entire book. To show how it worked itself out into the exhortations and visions of prophet and apocalyptic, into the civil and ecclesiastical laws of the priest, into the shrewd observations and the passionate faith of the wise man, and into the surging tides of joy and hope and trust that rise from the breast of the psalmist—in short, to show how the whole Old Testament stands related to it—would be a fascinating study. Suffice it here to say that, as a result of this all-dominating idea, the religion of Israel,

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in all its other significant features as well as in this one, stands in marked contrast to heathenism. As illustrative of this, it will repay us to dwell for a moment on its monotheism, its freedom, and its optimism.

There was a kind of monotheism in Egypt, and in Babylonia and Assyria. But it was limited to a few. It was speculative in character, and never completely extricated itself from the toils of pantheism. It did not stand in antagonism to polytheism, but embraced and justified it. In Israel, on the other hand, the thought of God was too ethical to be pantheistic, and too much permeated with the idea of love to be a mere speculation. Monotheism was there a matter of life, of experience. It was sharply opposed to everything polytheistic; it was also the faith of the people, or at least became such. It should further be noted that while elsewhere it was the idea of power that led to the doctrine of monotheism, in Israel it was the ethical idea that produced it. This is a significant difference. That the chief God of a world-empire like Babylonia, Assyria,

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or Egypt should come to be thought of as God of all the world has nothing strange about it. It is what we should have expected in view of his almost universal sway. But that Jehovah, the God of a petty people, who was about to destroy them for their sins, should, in the very act of destroying them, be elevated to the throne of universal sovereignty, is a most extraordinary fact. Such a thought could not have come from the heart of man, but must have had its source in the very bosom of God. In fact, no more striking evidence of the inspiration of the Old Testament is to be found than in this remarkable birth of a pure, vital, absolute monotheism. And this, I say, was made possible by the ethical idea in Israel's religion.

It was this idea, also, that underlay what I have termed its freedom. By this I mean the scope it accorded to individuality. This was one of its marked characteristics. In no other religion do we find the power of personality so manifest. Take, for instance, the long line of prophets. These mighty men, by the heave of

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their genius, time and again lifted the deadweight of tradition from off the shoulders of the nation and pushed the people on toward God. The rule is that dogma, ritual, and custom weave themselves about the human soul, stifling personality and shutting off the direct approach to God. As we turn to heathen peoples we find it so everywhere. They are held in the firm grip of the dead-hand of the past. But not so in Israel. Here religion in its inmost nature was based on life, on direct personal, moral fellowship with God. And so strong and continuous was this undercurrent of life that religion as a whole was never allowed to congeal into custom. The icy surface of tradition was ceaselessly broken up by the surging life of the soul as it struggled after immediate access to God. There was thus in the religion of Israel what we do not find elsewhere, a principle of progress, a freedom that enabled it to meet successfully every new emergency.

And this leads us to the third of the general characteristics that I mentioned above—its optimism. Of this

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little need be said. It is a familiar fact that while other peoples looked to the past for their golden age, the Hebrews found theirs in the future. Assured of the unfailing love of God, their optimism bridged the chasm of national ruin,—an achievement that can be laid to the credit of no other national faith,—resisted all the encroachments of Greek naturalism,—another victory that no other religion in Southwestern Asia was able to win,—and finally triumphed over death itself, thus becoming, through Christianity, the conquering faith of the world.

In the light of such facts as these, it is evident how superficial is the type of thought that would reduce the religion of Israel to the level of other ethnic faiths. Whatever similarities the two may have pale into utter insignificance before their overshadowing differences. No one can go deeply and impartially into this subject without agreeing with Gunkel that the Old Testament religion is “a veritable miracle of God among the religions of the ancient Orient.” Liberals sometimes boast that they find God’s revelation

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of Himself in all nature and in all history, while evangelicals confine themselves to "the thin line of Israelitic history." But, as Professor Bowne once remarked, this is the only line "thin enough to do any cutting." With the revelation made to Israel religion as a vital force in the world will either stand or fall. Apart from it religion lacks either the rationality or the content necessary to make it worth while.

But my purpose in dwelling at such length on this contrast between Hebraism and heathenism has not been to present an adequate discussion of this subject, but simply to illustrate the importance of such a general grasp of Old Testament religion. No one who thus clearly sees that in all its essential features it towers world-high above all other ancient faiths, and then perceives its organic connection with Christianity, and keeps these points of view permanently before him, is likely to be seriously disturbed by any of its shortcomings. Our troubles at this point are largely due to our looking for the evidences of inspiration to minor details, and not to the great thoughts of

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God that flood the pages of the old covenant. At a time when the doctrine of verbal inerrancy prevailed it was natural that attention should be fixed upon the letter. Every word then issued, as it were, from the mouth of God, and was sacred. But with our broader views of inspiration the points of interest have changed; and with them the methods of Biblical study should also change. In the disproportionate attention still given in our theological education to the minutiae of a merely grammatical exegesis I can only see the relic of a pre-critical stage of thought. According to our more modern point of view, it is in the sweep of the whole book or of the whole history that we see most clearly the Spirit of God. Our attention should, therefore, be directed from the outset to these central points of interest. For, if we are to be enthusiastic students and teachers of the Old Testament, we must discover in it truths at which our souls will kindle, and kindle permanently. And these can be found only in those towering peaks to which we have referred. The details are not to be neg-

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lected. But first of all we need to cultivate the habit of looking unto the hills from whence cometh our help.

The second suggestion I have to make toward the solution of our Old Testament problem is that *in detailed exegesis the stress should be placed on the religious value of the passage or book under consideration.* It is necessary to urge this point because of the vogue into which purely critical studies have come. The great Old Testament scholars of the past half-century have most of them been critics, and they have performed a monumental work. But the brilliancy of their achievements has turned the heads of some of the lesser lights, so that it has come to be thought that, if Biblical study is to be scientific and up to date, it must be predominantly "critical." As for the religious side, it seems to be assumed that it will take care of itself. Anyhow, it is to be left to men of a lower grade of intelligence, popularizers of theology. Independent scholars need not concern themselves with it. Now, with criticism as such I have no fault to find. But against this most extraor-

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dinary perversion of the function of the theological teacher I can not help raising my voice in protest. The business of the seminary is not to indoctrinate the student with the novelties of criticism, no matter how well founded they may be, but to open to him the treasures of the written word and to send him out thrilled with its truth to bring unto men its message of life and cheer. And for my part, I have never been able to see that to do this calls for a lower grade of intelligence than to distinguish between the literary styles of J E P and D. But whether it does or not, any other outcome of a theological training is a miscarriage. This our Biblical scholars are gradually coming to see. Even in Germany they are consequently devoting more and more attention to the religious side of their subject. And I believe that the time is not far distant when this stone, that has been set at nought of the builders, will again become the head of the corner.

I have not time to speak of the method that should be pursued in this religious exposition of the Old Testa-

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ment. But there is one fruitful principle that I wish to mention, and that is, that *the Old Testament should be viewed against the background of heathenism*. If this is done, the transient and obsolete in it will blend with its background and disappear from view, while by way of contrast whatever is distinctive and permanent in it will stand out in new clearness. Almost every page of the old book will thus become luminous with new meaning. This is especially true of the early chapters of Genesis, but it holds good of the whole book. Even the dreary pages of the legal literature begin from this point of view to take on new life and significance. The institutions and customs there described are many of them similar to those found among other ancient peoples; but they were not mere heathen importations. "Israel resembled in spiritual things," as Cornill says, "the fabulous king Midas who turned everything he touched into gold." In their hands foreign customs and institutions became vehicles of spiritual truth. It is consequently a useful as well as interesting study to

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show how from their raw beginnings in heathenism they were transformed and transfigured into the lofty, though monotonous, symbolism of the Mosaic law.

But it may be objected to this stress on the higher religious teaching of the Old Testament, which I am urging, that it is not true to the scientific spirit. It does not take account of all the facts. It solves its problem by disregarding the unfavorable data. This objection, however, is not so serious as it may seem. It really rests upon ignorance of the logic of history. Every developing thing must be judged by its outcome, not by what it came out of. By its fruits ye must know it, not by its roots, as Professor James has put it. It is then just in this rich fruitage of Israel's history that the only fair and adequate means of estimating it is to be found. The Old Testament is the connecting link between heathenism and Christianity. It presents religion in the process of transformation from superstition to rationality, from sorcery and divination to rational faith, from particularism to universalism, and

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from nationalism to individualism. In the very nature of the case, therefore, it must contain elements from the lower stages of development, and they may properly enough be made the subject of scholarly research. It is largely by means of them that the history of Israel has in modern times been reconstructed. But it is a grave mistake to suppose that they constitute an essential feature of Old Testament teaching. One of the marked characteristics of Israel's faith, as we have seen, was its freedom. It had within it a principle of growth, of movement, that tended to correct its own limitations. It is then in this principle and what it led to, and in that only, that we must look for the true nature of the old dispensation. It is, furthermore, the height of paedagogical unwisdom to devote any large amount of attention in theological education to its imperfect and merely transitory features. For education has to do not only with the acquisition of formal principles, but with the creation of personal attitude. And this is a matter of emphasis and of interest. It is the outcome of habit. If, then, the

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right personal attitude toward the Old Testament is to be developed, the stress must from the outset be placed upon the permanent elements in it, upon its superlative religious teaching. If this is done, if its great outstanding characteristics are brought into the foreground and kept there, and if everywhere throughout its pages its rich religious fruitage is made the chief object of attention, its shortcomings will practically disappear from view. As a mere matter of information we will still know that they are there, but like the spots on the sun, they will not enter as a disturbing factor into our experience.

Here, then, is the solution of our problem of the Old Testament. And here, too, is to be found the bond of union between the opposing camps of Biblical scholarship. In this field we have had of late the thesis and the antithesis; it is time now for the synthesis. And the synthesis can be effected only along the line I have indicated. It has been the fault of one extreme as well as the other that wittingly or unwittingly it has placed the stress on

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the non-essential. It has not put first things first, and second things second. To do that must now be our task. And, as it is done, as the everlasting religious truths of the Old Testament are lifted again into their rightful place of primacy, there to remain as "the shining of a flaming fire by night," it will become clear that the differences of the past have not been so serious as some have supposed. It will be seen that we are all still brethren in a common faith. The ancient word still speaks to us all. Tried and tested in the fires of criticism, it has not been found wanting. Its sacred pages still glow with inspiration and instruction. We all rejoice in its light, and, entranced with its visions of the God of Israel, turn confidently to the future and cry with the psalmist:

Lift up your heads, O ye gates:  
Yea, lift them up, ye everlasting doors;  
And the king of glory will come in,

and then, as the question comes back,  
Who is this king of glory? we triumphantly answer,

Jehovah of Hosts  
He is the king of glory.







